DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 584 CG 022 082

AUTHOR Barbera-Stein, Linda; Kraft, Joan Marie
TITLE Size, Composition and Utility of Support Networks for Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (39th, Berkeley, CA, August 6-8, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Comparative Analysis; *Early Parenthood; *Family Relationship; Females; Mothers; Peer Relationship; *Pregnancy; *Racial Differences; Social Networks; *Social Support Groups

ABSTRACT

The normative transition from adolescent to adult is interrupted by adolescent motherhood. Many argue that obstacles presented by adolescent motherhood can be overcome with support of family, friends, and the baby's father. To examine the size of social networks and the perceived and actual support derived from such networks, data were obtained from 177 black and white females adolescents who were either pregnant or first time mothers enrolled in one of seven educational support programs for new mothers. The findings revealed that the content of networks and perceived support from network members differed by parenting status; pregnant teenagers were more involved with peers while parenting teenagers were more involved with family. Further, parenting adolescents received more support from family members than did pregnant adolescents. The differences between pregnant and parenting teenagers appear to be linked to the construct of status transitions. In addition, black respondents were more likely to receive support from family than were white respondents. (Author/NB)

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SIZE, COMPOSITION AND UTILITY OF SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING ADOLESCENTS

Linda Barbera-Stein, Ph.D.
National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse

Joan Marie Kraft, M.A.
Northwestern University
National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse

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It is generally assumed to be true that early parenting leads to deleterious consequences for young women and their children because adolescent motherhood constitutes a break in the schedule for the transition form adolescence to adulthood (Furstenberg, 1976). Many have argued (Testa and Bowen, 1987; Furstenberg and Crawford, 1978) that overcoming the obstacles set in place by early childbearing can be accomplished with the help of family. Family can provide a variety of services that make it easier to provide childcare, complete school and begin working.

As Stack argues in All Our Kin, networks of kin (nuclear and extended families) are developed in response to problems providing for the basic needs of family members. She argues that, among poor, black, ghetto residents, kin develop a network of mutual obligations such that the basic needs of members of the network are met. While some of the help provided is financial, much of what constitutes help is in-kind. For instance, the practice of child-keeping allows first time mothers to rely on their own mothers or aunts to care for the new child. Such help might allow the young mother to continue her education (Testa and Bowen, 1987; Furstenberg and Crawford, 1978) or to get training and secure a job.

Although networks are not limited to actual blood kin, family may provide more of the types of support necessary. For example Stack (1974) argues that kin bring their relatives (cousins, partners, in-laws, etc.) with them into the network of help. Friends, on the other hand, only bring themselves.

Another line of inquiry on the kind of support that a baby's father brings to the adolescent mother indicates that it is likely that the teen's family is better able to provide the teen with financial support than is the young father. However, the father may be able to provide emotional support that allows the teen to be more satisfied with herself and her life. Thus, if the goal is more support, blood relatives may provide more help than friends.

Findings of studies are in line with expectations. In a study of teenage mothers who received AFDC, Testa and Bowen (1987) find that young women who lived with their parents after birth were less likely to have a repeat pregnancy and more likely to finish school (high school or GED). Furstenberg and Crawford (1978) find that among a group of black teenage mothers, living with parents increases the chances of continuing high school. Unger and Wandersman (1988) find that support from the father of the child (or a father substitute) and from the parents increases the teenage mother's satisfaction with her life. However, support from the parents has more impact on parenting style and the teen's worries about day to day life. These studies indicate that support does mitigate the serious consequences of early motherhood.

While these studies point to the importance of living with parents and parental support, they do not address the issues of the size, diffuseness or complexity of the kin network that Stack discusses. While Furstenberg is able to look at some of the

types of support (financial, advice, babysitting) that teens received from their parents he is not able to look at the support from other members of the teen's network. This might be crucial for teens who have little or no contact with parents but who live with other kin such as grandparents or aunts and uncles. Hence, other avenues of support have not been addressed in the literature. We agree that parental support is crucial however, we go beyond this basic assumption to look, in more detail, at the size and composition of the support network as well as the content of support which is provided.

A further consideration is whether or not the network is in place prior to the time the teen needs such support. The speed with which the teen can come to rely on the people in her network may have serious consequences for her adjustment to the problems she encounters as a new mother. Certainly, having an intact network that allows her to carry on with her schooling and/or work plans results in less of a disruption of the normative schedule than having to develop such a network after birth occurs. Hence, teens with an intact network might have a slight advantage over teens without such a network.

HYPOTHESES

The above leads to several hypotheses regarding the use of social networks by teenage mothers. Given Stack's argument about the development of networks among poor, black urban residents, we anticipate that black teens might already be embedded in such networks. In particular, we hypothesize that black teens have

larger networks that include more kin than white teens. Further, it is likely that the core networks of black teens include more family members than the networks in which white teens are embedded. Regarding type of support, we expect black teens to believe that they will receive more support from members of the core network than white teens. Further, we anticipate that black teens will actually receive more help from core members of their networks than white teenagers.

In addition to differences between black and white teens, we expect to find differences between pregnant and parenting teens. The size, composition and utility of support networks are likely to change and vary with the transition from adolescent-as-child or -peer to adolescent-as-parent. Perhaps teens, while pregnant, may be in the initial stages of developing a network of reciprocal obligations to help them cope with the problems of parenting; while parenting teens on the other hand, already faced with the dilemmas of parenting, may have their support networks largely in place. Hence, we might expect that parenting teens have larger networks and that they both perceive and receive more help from members of their networks than do pregnant teens.

Finally, we expect to find that teens who receive more help from their support networks are able to overcome the difficulties associated with a break in the normative schedule. Specifically, the more the network helps the teen, the more likely it is that she will finish school and begin (or continue) working.

THE SAMPLE

To date, we have data to address the first set of issues; the size of networks and the perceived and actual support derived from the networks. We can compare the networks of black and white teens. We can compare the networks of pregnant to parenting teens. Although we can not report outcome measures (school enrollment and labor force activity) at this point in the project, we are collecting short run measures (6 months to one year) of educational and employment statuses with which to compare the outcomes of teens embedded in networks to teens not embedded in such networks. (These data will be available to report in time for the annual meeting in August, 1989).

The data for this analysis come from a sample of 177 young pregnant and first time mothers who are enrolled in one of seven educational support programs for new mothers. All participants are between the ages of 13 and 19 at intake. The vast majority of teens are living with their parents or other family members (80 percent) at intake. Over two-thirds are black (70 percent). Most of the teens (77 percent) have not yet completed high school. The vast majority of teens (94 percent) were not working at intake. The sources of financial support for the teens are varied and typically include a combination of some of the following: parents' income, own income, public aid and spouse's income.

Other characteristics of the sample should be noted here. All teens enrolled in the research project have made the decision

to have their child. Nationwide, roughly half of all pregnancies to white teenagers (47 percent) and one-third of all pregnancies to black teenagers (37 percent) end in abortion (Children's Defense Fund, 1988). The decision to carry to term or to get an abortion likely is made in conjunction with parents and the father of the baby. At the time this decision is being made the issue of support for the child is likely to be raised. The level of support we find among the teens in our sample may be higher than among teens who had abortions. The families of the teens who have children may have expressed their commitment to helping the teen raise her baby.

A second important characteristic of the sample is that the teens are already enrolled in a social service program. While this does not replace the support of family and friends, it may be an important indicator of the degree of isolation of the teen. Specifically, teens who are isolated from family and friends are also likely to be isolated from social service agencies and, hence, less likely to be enrolled in the programs.

THE MEASURES

At intake, teens respond to a series of items on the size and composition of their social networks. They are asked to list up to 10 relatives and state their specific relationship to each. They also are asked to list up to 10 friends. Next, they are asked to select up to three family members and three friends to whom they feel the most close. These (up to 6) people comprise a teen's core network. For each six core members of their networks

and the baby's father, teens are asked how much they think they can count on each person to: (1) work through a problem with her; (2) provide money, food or clothing for her or her baby and (3) to be available to care for the baby. Teens then are asked whether or not any core family, core friends or the baby's father provided each of the three services in the past week.[1]

These items were used to construct scales measuring perceived size of social network, perceived social support and actual support. Perceived size of whole network is the sum of the number of family members and the number of friends listed (range: 0-20). Perceived size of the core network includes the number of family members and friends to whom the teen feels the closest (range: 0-6).

Perceived social support is measured along three dimensions: perceived support from core family members, perceived support from core friends and perceived support from the baby's father. Scores for these measures are derived from the series of items (mentioned above) asking the teens how much they feel that core network members (family and friends) and the baby's father can be counted on to help. Teens are asked to state to what degree (1=low and 5=high) each member can be relied upon for each of the three types of support. Since there are three possible core family members and three core friends, the scores for perceived social support from family and friends range form 0 (no members to provide support) to 45 (all members can be counted on all the time). The score for support from the father ranges from 3 (he

can not be counted on for anything) to 15 (he can be counted on to provide all three types of support).

Actual support is measured by a set of items eliciting information on whether any of the three types of support were provided to the teen in the past week. There is a separate set of questions for all members of the core family network combined, all members of the friendship network combined and for the father of the baby.[2]

The independent variables of interest are race and parenting status. At intake, staff report on both race and parenting status. It is unlikely that there is any measurement error in these variables. Given the exploratory nature of this work, no other control variables are included at this time.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The test of these hypotheses relies on analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if the mean values on the outcome measures (perceived size of network, perceived social support and actual social support) are significantly different for whites and blacks. Separate analyses are run to compare pregnant and parenting teens.[3] The analysis is based upon a subset of 131 black and white teens who have information on all variables.[4] Seventy-seven percent of the teens included are black and 56 percent of the teens have already given birth.

As indicated in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2, the perceived size of broad and core networks of family and friends does not vary by race or parenting status. On average, whites and blacks include

seven family members and friends in their list of network members. Likewise, parenting and pregnant teens include seven family members and friends in their broad networks. Size of core network does not vary by race; both blacks and white list, on average, 5 core network members. While size of core network does not vary by parenting status, the composition of the network does vary by parenting status. Parenting teens tend to have more family members (mean=2.74) in their networks than pregnant teens (mean=2.47). On the other hand, pregnant teens tend to have more friends in their networks (mean=2.40) than parenting teens (mean=2.03). These differences are significant at the .05 level. The difference reflects a shift in the composition of perceived networks as the transition form adolescent-as-child or -peer to adolescent-as-parent takes place. This difference also reflects the need for different types of support once the child is born. It is unlikely that many of the teenagers' peers will be able to give her the type of help that she requires once her child is born. Her family, on the other hand, likely has the financial resources or practical knowledge to help her cope with the demands of childcare.

Since it is likely that different people have different resources with which to help the teen, it is important to look at the levels of perceived and actual support the teen receives from different members of her network. The comparison of perceived support is reported in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2. Although not statistically significant, blacks perceive slightly more support

from family members and the fathers of their babies than do whites. Whites, on the other hand, perceive slightly more support from friends than blacks. Given the smaller friendship networks of blacks, this difference might be expected.

Parenting and pregnant teens are significantly different in how they view the support available from core members of their kin network. As indicated in table 2.2, parenting teens (mean=32.85) score significantly higher than pregnant teens (mean=26.72) on the measure of perceived support from family members. Although not significant, pregnant teens think that they can rely more on both the fathers of their babies and their friends for support than parenting teens. These findings provide an interesting picture of who it is that teens rely on prior to and just after the birth of their children.

Actual support is probably more important for the ability of the teen to overcome the difficulties of parenting than is perceived support. Thinking that someone will help is of no aid if the person does not come through. As Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 indicate, actual social support from family members varies by race and parenting status. Blacks score significantly higher on the first measure of actual social support (which includes only those items applicable to both pregnant and parenting adolescents). Blacks are more likely to have counted on their family members to work through a problem and to provide money, food or clothing in the past week (mean=1.44) than whites (mean=1.04). Pregnant teens are significantly less likely

(mean=1.14) than parenting teens (mean=1.51) to have gotten these types of support from family members in the past week. There are no significant differences in actual level of social support from the father of the baby or from core members of the friendship network by race or parenting status.

Comparing teens using all available measures of actual support (that is, two items for pregnant teens and 3 items for parenting teens) yields the same pattern of differences between blacks and whites and between parenting and pregnant teens. As indicated in Table 4.1, blacks (mean=.71) are significantly more likely than whites (mean=.52) to get support from family members. Table 4.2 shows that parenting teens (mean=.74) are significantly more likely to have received support from family (mean=.57) than pregnant teens. No significant differences exist when making these two comparisons for support from the baby's father or support from friends.

An interesting pattern of actual support received from family, friends and the father of the baby is highlighted in the analysis of actual social support (Tables 3.1, 3.2, 4.1 and 4.2). On average, teens report receiving more help from family members than from friends or the baby's father. For instance, the score for family support for blacks is 1.44, while the score for support from the baby's father is only .96 and the score for support from friends is only .80. The pattern for whites is similar. Parenting and pregnant teens also exhibit this pattern

of actual support. Hence, where it counts--actual support--teens rely most heavily on family members for support.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis supports the contention that black and white teenagers draw on different sources of support to help them cope with the obstacles of parenting. While there is little difference in the number of people from which to draw support, there is a difference in the actual support received. Specifically, blacks are more likely to have received support from family members than whites.

That teens get more help from family members is congruent with Stack's ideas about the kin networks that poor, urban blacks develop in order to survive. Kin might be more readily relied on because they provide more numerous members for the network than any one friend might provide.

Pregnant and parenting teens differ on the composition of the network and on reliance on parents for actual support. Pregnant teens perceive more involvement with their peers than parenting teens. This likely is related to the process of transitioning from adolescent to adult. Prior to giving birth, the teen and others in her community might still regard her as adolescent and therefore it is appropriate for her to be involved with other adolescents. However, the birth of her child confers adult status on the teen (either in her own mind or in the eyes of her community). At this point, the teen might be establishing her own place in the kin network. The process of asking for and

returning favors might be important in establishing her own place in the network and hence conferring adult status.

ENDNOTES

1. Only parenting teens answered the question on pertaining to actual care for the baby. Pregnant teens were to respond not applicable to this item.

2. Teens who were pregnant at intake were to respond not applicable to the questions eliciting information on actual help in caring for the baby in the past week. Because of this, the comparison of actual support is done in two ways. In the first instance, we only look at those items answered by all teens (have members of the core networks and the father: provided food, clothing or money and helped the teen work through a problem). In the second instance, we sum the applicable items for each teen (the two just listed apply for pregnant teens and the two just listed plus the item asking about actual help with baby care apply for parenting teens) and then divide by the appropriate number to get the score for actual support.

3. Two-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the relationship between parenting status and social support was due to a significant difference in the parenting status of black and white teens in the sample. The results indicate that the relationship between parenting status and social support is not generated by the relationship between race and social support. The results reported are for the one-way ANOVA.

4. Because this is an ongoing project, not all forms have been received and processed for all participants. The data for the analysis are taken from two separate forms.

Table 1.1
Average Size of Network by Race

	Black	White	F-statistic
BROAD NETWORK			
Number of family and friends	6.85	6.90	.006
Number of family	3.96	3.74	.275
Number of friends	2.91	3.16	.348
CORE NETWORK			
Number of family and friends	4.75	5.03	1.077
Number of family	2.62	2.65	.042
Number of friends	2.91	3.16	.556

Table 1.2
Average Size of Network by Parenting Status

	Pregnant	Parent	F-statistic
BROAD NETWORK			
Number of family and friends	6.63	7.06	.454
Number of family	3.60	4.13	2.189
Number of friends	3.04	2.93	.080
CORE NETWORK			
Number of family and friends	4.88	4.76	.226
Number of family	2.47	2.74	4.781
Number of friends	2.40	2.03	4.204*

*Significant at the .05 level.

Table 2.1
Perceived Support from Family, Friends and
Baby's Father by Race

	Black	White	F-statistic
Support from family	30.53	29.19	.403
Support from friends	22.41	25.06	1.053
Support from baby's father	10.60	9.65	1.046

Table 2.2
Perceived Support from Family, Friends and
Baby's Father by Parenting Status

	Pregnant	Parent	F-statistic
Support from family	26.72	32.85	12.590**
Support from friends	23.42	22.82	.072
Support from baby's father	10.61	10.11	.393

**Significant at the .01 level

Table 3.1
Actual Support from Family, Friends and
Baby's Father by Race:
Measure One of Actual Support

	Black	White	F-statistic
Support from family	1.44	1.06	7.00**
Support from friends	.80	.87	.198
Support from baby's father	.96	.97	.002

**Significant at the .01 level

Table 3.2
Actual Support from Family, Friends and
Baby's Father by Parenting Status:
Measure One of Actual Support

	Pregnant	Parent	F-statistic
Support from family	1.14	1.51	9.263**
Support from friends	.81	.83	.035
Support from baby's father	.98	.93	.124

**Significant at the .01 level

Table 4.1
Actual Support from Family, Friends and
Baby's Father by Race:
Measure Two of Actual Support

	Black	White	F-statistic
Support from family	.71	.52	8.810**
Support from friends	.35	.44	1.426
Support from baby's father	.45	.44	.024

**Significant at the .01 level

Table 4.2
Actual Support from Family, Friends and
Baby's Father by Parenting Status:
Measure Two of Actual Support

	Pregnant	Parent	F-statistic
Support from family	.57	.74	9.636**
Support from friends	.40	.35	.638
Support from baby's father	.49	.42	1.185

**Significant at the .01 level

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